



Bundesministerium
für Bildung
und Forschung

Welcome Address

on the occasion of the Bologna Seminar
The European Dimension of Quality Assurance

at the Umweltforum Berlin

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Ladies and Gentlemen,

First of all, I would like to pass on the best wishes of the Head of Directorate for Institutions of Higher Education at the Federal Ministry of Education and Research. Peter Greisler would very much have liked to be here today. Due to an urgent senior-level appointment he is unable to take part. I hope you will find me to be a worthy replacement.

Ever since I started working on this subject, I have heard one question again and again: Why do we even need a new approach for quality assurance in higher education?

German institutions of higher education pride themselves on their high quality awareness. Teachers at universities have traditionally maintained a high quality based on their own intrinsic motivation. In addition, there were (and still are) rules for filling vacancies, bans on in-house appointments and the obligation to obtain Ministry approval before introducing new courses.

But there have also been critical voices in Germany which have questioned government interference, the lack of innovation on the part of universities, and overregulation. We cannot deny that the rising number of students, which has not always been accompanied by a corresponding increase in the number of teachers and financial resources, has affected the quality of some universities.

Quality differences in research and higher education are not just a German phenomenon; they also exist in other countries in Europe and across the world. At the same time, the world is moving on: online e-learning programmes can be accessed from anywhere in the world. Owing to the freedom to provide services within the EU, courses run by EU universities can be offered across the entire European Union. International experience is becoming an ever more important prerequisite for a career in science or business. That is why we want to enhance mobility in the European Higher Education Area and across the world. This means that we have to address the subject of quality standards in an international context. In Leuven, the Education Ministers of the European Higher Education Area stressed that quality assurance needs a European perspective. We need to ask ourselves: What good is free access if the quality of education at our freely accessible universities is inferior to that of universities in the USA, the UK, Australia, and possibly even parts of Asia? We need highly qualified staff, and that is why we need university students in Germany. We can only keep

good students here if we maintain high quality standards, and these students can only develop into highly qualified staff if they received an education at a top level.

No one disputes that universities and university teachers have a fundamental interest in and are responsible for the quality of studies and teaching.

But other stakeholders also have an interest in high-quality higher education: students want to receive a good education and obtain degrees that are recognized abroad. The state and society need qualified staff and well-informed citizens.

Let me make it clear that I am not advocating interference in the content of university courses. However, any modern and internationally active university should – if only in its own interest – apply mechanisms to identify its own weaknesses and ensure that suitable countermeasures are taken. A view from outside by external experts – and I do *not* mean the government's perspective – should be an integral part of any such procedure.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Today's event focuses on the mutual recognition of accreditation decisions and on quality assurance for joint programmes. These are the basic prerequisites for student mobility and for the development of a European Higher Education Area. The mutual recognition of qualifications and academic achievements is easier when each side is confident of the other's quality. A demand for recognition always involves a critical look at the quality of one's own programmes.

This can degenerate into a stalemate of mutual accusations, or it can lead to a fruitful attempt to improve quality. The latter should be a matter of course for all those involved in the European Higher Education Area.

The importance of quality assurance for improving mobility within the European Higher Education Area and beyond is also being addressed in the international working group on Mobility, which has set itself the aim of drafting a European mobility strategy.

Promoting mobility within Europe will be easier for universities – but also for funding providers who offer scholarships or loans – if they can rely on the quality of courses attended at universities in other countries. The application of the Qualifications Framework for the European Higher Education Area, the ECTS and the Diploma Supplement play an important role in this context. In addition, the European Quality Assurance Register (EQAR) and the quality assurance agencies listed in it make a significant contribution through their common

orientation towards the European Standards and Guidelines. We need to jointly support the application of these instruments and the use of the quality register as a reference.

Even though we are here to talk about the European dimension of quality assurance, there is something I would like to add: if we want to intensify our interaction with countries outside Europe, we need to engage in dialogue with other parts of the world, as is already the case in the Bologna Policy Fora or the ASEM Education Process of Education Ministers from Asia and Europe, for example.

Ladies and gentlemen,

based on its responsibility for European cooperation and consumer protection, the German Federal Government has a special interest in ensuring effective quality assurance in higher education, both at universities in Germany and abroad. It is in the taxpayer's interest to make sure that students who receive scholarships or government funding under the Federal Training Assistance Act can obtain a high-quality education wherever they choose to go.

In the longer term, the European Higher Education Area must be based on comparable quality standards that apply to all institutions of higher education in Europe, and on efforts to ensure that the quality of any given programme is made transparent through quality assurance and accreditation.

That is why the the Federal Ministry of Education and Research supports the German Rectors' Conference by funding the "nexus" project. The aim is to help universities to further develop their courses and increase their quality. Nexus collects and publishes good examples and concepts from universities and offers a discussion forum.

Finally, on behalf on the Federal Ministry of Education an Research I would like to thank you for inviting me to this event. Over the course of the day, different perspectives from a wide range of different countries will be presented, and there will no doubt be lively discussions in the workshops. I wish all participants a successful and productive event.

Thank you!